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Trafficking Subjects: The Politics of Mobility in  
Nineteenth-Century America (review)

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through a selection of themes chosen as representative of “the experience of the people of Canada, faced with the multiplicities of their history and their various perceptions of it” (xiv). These themes include wilderness, violence, immigration, nomadism, and dispossession. In addition, Howells considers the recurring figure of the “outsider,” an ambiguous, marginalized figure that might be read as “an emblem of the attempt to facilitate understandings of who those ‘others’ are and where their voices are coming from” (xiv). Above all, Canadian history and its revision are seen as key to the cross-cultural dialogue that is the ultimate goal of the analyses of books and films included in the study. “Our reading of history and its reinterpretations in a wide range of literary texts and film from across Canada,” Howells sums up, “has been our attempt to engage, through varied critical and theoretical approaches, in a cross-cultural dialogue” (259). Moreover, “shared understanding of and respect for divergent perceptions of history will be the only way for Canada—or indeed for any country—to survive, let alone evolve, in the twenty-first century” (262). Perceptions of Canada and its cultural future expressed by voices abroad are worth listening to, if only to hear stated again—and how articulately in the case of critics like Howells—the necessary recognition of the complex, multiple nature of “Canadianness.”

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Mark Simpson. *Trafficking Subjects: The Politics of Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

In *Trafficking Subjects: The Politics of Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America*, Mark Simpson, Associate Professor of English at the University of Alberta, offers us a compendium of nineteenth-century travel narratives, what he eruditely labels “scenes of traffic and transit” (iv). Sporting a chronological breath that takes in antebellum America, the postbellum period, and even finding time for contemporary political commentary, the book explores a fecund literary landscape that capably reveals the complexities of movement in the United States. The politics of mobility of which Simpson speaks suggest that travel and movement are processes

laden with cultural values, contests, and transactions, in essence, thoroughly entwined with relations of power. As the author asserts in the Introduction, the goal here is “to understand mobility not as a naturally occurring phenomenon but much more rigorously as a mode of social contest decisive in the manufacture of subjectivity and the determination of belonging” (xiii). With this in mind, *Trafficking Subjects* draws on contemporary cultural theory (notably Grewal and Kaplan) to illuminate the complex interplay between such contested terms as travel and space, capital and progress.

The four chapters contained within *Trafficking Subjects* tender a diverse tour through nineteenth-century American literature. The case studies are carefully arranged, well grounded in critical theory, and cogently illuminate mobility as a social contest. Chapter One, “Nat Turner’s Restlessness” explores the Southampton slave uprising of 1831 through the medium of Thomas Gray’s *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. Chapter Two turns to Poe and Melville, dubbed “dramas of uncertain circulation” (26) to trace threads of neo-colonial tourism, commerce, and the publishing industry in antebellum America. “Secret Circuits, Fugitive Moves” ponders themes of national crisis, belonging, and secrecy via a discussion of the Fugitive Slave Act and the “underground railroad.” The memoirs of Sarah Edmonds and Harriet Tubman are utilized here to reveal the subtle interactions between mobility, information, public anxiety, and surveillance, namely how “crises of motion become crises of knowledge” (79). In the fourth chapter, “Mobility’s Disciplines,” the emphasis shifts to the latter years of the nineteenth century. Stephen Crane’s despatches from Mexico and Jack London’s “The Road” appear here as exemplars of an era of transformation and industrial strife, an age where mobility was essential to capitalist efficiency but also antithetical to social discipline. As Simpson concludes, mobility in the nineteenth century was a powerful commodity that advantaged white, male, middle-class protagonists at the expense of others. Crucially, however, these processes were also unexpected, anarchic, contested. As the author notes, “[H]owever determined and directed, histories and itineraries of human movement remain contingent, accidental; that the traces of contest legible within these histories and itineraries can teach us to see how they might have been different—and so imagine how they could now be remade” (127).

*Trafficking Subjects* is a well-prosecuted and ingenious work. It convincingly illustrates how various literary forms—poems, novels, public exhibitions, travelogues—served imperatives of imperial acquisition, capitalist process, ethnic and class divisions, and projections of national

destiny. As Simpson tells us, travel is not a flimsy term encapsulated by leisure, freedom, romance, and adventure nor an incontrovertible badge of American national identity. Instead it is a complex process harbouring distinct social, racial, pedagogic, and class functions. The contemporary relevance of such an assessment is starkly elucidated in the Epilogue, where Simpson turns to critique the escapades of Microsoft and the current Bush administration as proclaiming their own politics of mobility based on American Exceptionalism. Tracing a direct link from the Fugitive Slave Act to the Patriot Act, Simpson advocates resistance as well as awareness, ending on some sound advice: "Against imperial amnesia, we must ensure that history's problematic, much like mobility's, stays subject to contest" (133).

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Gautam Chakravarty. *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.

In his epic study *History of the Sepoy War in India* (1864–76) John Kaye remarked, "To be invaded and to be conquered is a state of things appreciable to the inhabitant of India." In this staggeringly complacent comment, Kaye points to one of the fundamental misunderstandings that dogged British rule in India throughout the nineteenth century. Kaye goes on to assert that *kismet* is responsible for India's subordination, suggesting that the Indian people languidly accepted their subaltern status as God's will.

Until the 1857 uprising, the Indian subcontinent had been administered by the private trading concern, the East India Company. The British occupation of India was widely regarded as being based on mutual consent, and it was argued that Britain's influence would, in the long run, be a nurturing one. As the Great Exhibition Catalogue demonstrates, the mid-Victorians regarded India as on a par with Greece—an ancient civilization in decline as a result of its decadent ways. With guidance, the Indians might, just, one day be able to take responsibility for themselves once more. This view was hastily abandoned after the events of 1857–59, and subsequent interactions with the subcontinent were much more cautious. While company officials had originally intermarried with local women, by the 1850s the arrival of British women and missionaries in India had made inter-racial marriages taboo. Whereas in the past these cross-cultural unions had facilitated